

them, to make a government for the State of Maryland, which shall protect our property, and protect us in our persons, and in all the rights which we claim under the Government. I ask whether, on reflection, they think their time is well employed in this exhibition of patriotism, rather than in the legitimate execution of the duties which the people demand at their hands; whether, and especially I ask it, when sent here to frame a government for the security of our property, they can feel justified in taking it from us.

I thank the portion of the Convention which has been so indulgent as to allow me thus much time to express my views.

Mr. STIRLING. During the course of this debate I hesitated some time whether I should submit any remarks whatever to the consideration of the Convention. I have been very anxious that this debate should close within a reasonable period. The continued labors of this Convention, at this season of the year, had become so irksome to all, and so contrary to the expectation of the people, for I think people upon both sides have been disappointed at the long-continued session of this Convention, that I had almost come to the conclusion not to say a word upon this subject. But upon further reflection, and particularly upon the solicitation of some of my friends, I have thought proper, at this stage of the debate, briefly to explain my views; and I hope I shall be able to conclude within the time fixed by the order of the house for taking the vote.

In discussing this question, without any disrespect to that sacred book so often quoted in this Convention, I intend in these remarks to lay it entirely aside. I shall not undertake to prove or to disprove that the Bible sanctions or does not sanction slavery. I shall not undertake to prove or disprove that dependently upon the Bible, or independently of the Bible, the institution of slavery is or is not a sin. So far as I am concerned, I have never regarded it as sinful. I do not regard it so now, as an individual fact. All I have to say upon that subject is that it neither proves nor disproves the material facts that are contained in the matters before this Convention.

We all know that in different periods of the world, what has been justifiable at one time becomes unjustifiable at another. What is right at one time becomes wrong at another. You may talk as much as you please about the immutable principles of right; but all history, sacred and profane, and the experience of man proves that what is right at some times is not right at others. We have only to refer, not to the sacred scriptures necessarily, but to the period to which the early part of the scriptural record relates, to show that the marriage of the nearest connections, even children of the same father and mother, has been permitted under the sanction of the system of religion that prevailed at that time.

What is the institution of slavery, as it bears upon the question of morals? It occupies the same position as every other institution. It takes its position in every age of the world, according to the circumstances that surround it in that age of the world. Does any man pretend to say that any great ruler or moral teacher ever undertook to establish the principle that the effect of despotic rule over the population subjected to it, is contrary to the moral law? Yet there is not now a single citizen here or elsewhere under our form of government who does not believe that such despotic forms of government are in their nature contrary to human rights, and ought to be as speedily as practicable removed.

The institution of slavery takes its stand, like any other institution temporal in its character, upon the same basis with other peculiar institutions, despotic in their character, which have been swept away; and finds its moral justification, or want of moral justification, in the character of the age in which it exists and claims a right to perpetuate itself.

What is the institution of slavery to-day? In this respect, I wish to say frankly that I take upon one branch of the subject, precisely the view the gentleman from Somerset (Mr. Dennis) charged upon us as one of the motives of this movement. I believe the institution of slavery to be the corner-stone of this rebellion. I believe it to be the cause of this war. I believe it to be the cause of all the trouble in this State. And so far as it may relate to my own personal views and opinions upon that subject, it is this particular thing which has made me first, above all considerations, an emancipationist.

I do not mean to say there are not other considerations which may be higher; but I mean to say that these are the considerations which have prevailed upon my mind in regard to this subject. Like everybody else, I suppose, I have undergone many changes. I certainly was, at one time in my life, not a very mature period of it, a good deal of a pro-slavery man. I have been connected with the institution in a variety of ways; and at that period, its effects had not been impressed upon my mind. But from the very moment this rebellion progressed sufficiently to be seen and felt, and particularly in this State, I made up my mind that the existence of slavery was incompatible with the good of the country, and with the assertion of those political principles to which I was attached, and even with the safety of myself and my friends in the advocacy of those principles.

I recollect perfectly well that when the first outburst took place in the city of Baltimore in regard to this rebellion—I do not mean particularly the case of the 19th of April—it developed to my mind a state of public feeling in society which I had but dimly apprehended. I found that those who stood around